

## Vermicomposting

### What is vermicomposting?

- Commonly known as worm composting, vermicomposting is the process of using redworms or red wigglers to convert organic/food waste into humus, a nutrient-rich soil conditioner.
- The worms feed on your food waste, turning it into some of the best fertilizer on earth.
- Vermicomposting works similar to regular composting, except worms are used.
- Vermicomposting can be done in small spaces, such as apartments.

### Why should I vermicompost?

Using worms to decompose food waste offers several advantages:

- It can reduce household garbage costs.
- It produces fewer odors and attracts fewer pests than putting food wastes into a garbage container.
- It saves water and electricity that kitchen sinks and garbage disposals use.
- It produces free, high-quality fertilizer.
- It requires little space or maintenance.
- It produces free worms for fishing.

### What do I need to get started?

The materials needed to start a vermicomposting system are simple and inexpensive. All you will need are a worm bin, bedding, water, worms and your food scraps.

- **Worm Bin.** A suitable bin can be constructed of untreated, non-aromatic wood, or it can be a plastic container. A wooden box is better if you will keep the worms outdoors, because it will keep the worms cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter. An outdoor wooden bin can even serve double-duty as a bench. If a plastic container is used, it should be thoroughly washed and rinsed before the worms and bedding are added. The bin size depends on the amount of food produced by your household. The general rule is one square foot of surface area for each pound of garbage generated per week.
- **Bedding.** The worms need bedding material in which to burrow. It should be a non-toxic, fluffy material that holds moisture and allows air to circulate. Suitable materials include shredded paper (such as black-and-white newspapers, paper bags, computer paper, or cardboard); composted animal manure (cow, horse, or rabbit); shredded, decaying leaves; peat moss (which increases moisture retention); or any combination of these. Do not use glossy paper or magazines.
- **Water.** The bedding must be kept moist (but not wet) to enable the worms to breathe. Worms don't have lungs; they must take in oxygen through their moist skin.
- **Worms.** It is important to get the type of worms that will thrive in a worm bin. Only redworms or "wigglers" which are "composting worms" should be used (do not use night crawlers or other types of worms).
- **Food Scraps.** Feed your worms any non-meat, organic waste such as vegetables, fruits, eggshells, tea bags, coffee grounds, paper coffee filters, and shredded garden waste. Do not add meat scraps or bones, fish, greasy or oily foods, fat, tobacco, or pet or human manure – these items will cause odors, attract pests, and contaminate the finished compost.

### Where can I get more information?

- For more information, contact the Indiana Department of Environmental Management, Office of Pollution Prevention and Technical Assistance at (800) 988-7901 or visit our IDEM Web page at:  
<http://www.IN.gov/idem/oppta/recycling/organics/index.html>.